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A UNIQUE PROBLEM CARRIED OUT BY ELEMENTARY-SCHOOL PUPILS

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As a means of motivation for some of the work in the elementary department of the Ethical Culture School, it was decided early last year to prepare and publish a yearbook. Several years ago such a booklet was printed, which proved to be a fine means for stimulating the pupils in all of the grades to their best endeavors in preparing material that should be worthy of being put into the book.

Last year, in accordance with modern educational methods, it was decided best to try the experiment of having the entire project, so far as possible, the work of the children themselves. Therefore, a central committee of children was elected by the pupils to formulate plans, pass upon contributions, and act, in general, as a body of managers and editors. A secretary was also chosen to record the proceedings of the general meetings. Each class was invited to send one delegate to represent it at the central board meetings. This representative brought a weekly report of the progress of the yearbook work in his class and returned to his class with a report of the progress made by the other classes. This plan quickened the interest in each class from the first grade to the seventh and made the whole undertaking co-operative and unified. It was the co-operative endeavor of children ranging in age from six to twelve years that made the project unique.

In these meetings suggestions were made for the plan and contents of the book. In order to be ready with their suggestions the pupils consulted old copies of the Ethical Culture School magazines as well as many other school and camp magazines and booklets. Each committee member also gathered as much information and as many suggestions from his classmates as they were able to give. Then came the meeting to consider types of contributions and ways

and means of dividing and managing the work. The following scheme of organization was approved and put into operation:

SCHEME OF ORGANIZATION

Room committees (under the guidance of the class teacher).—Elected or appointed in each class to pass upon and correct, if necessary, contributions of all kinds. Accepted articles sent to chairman of teachers' committee, who passed them on to the various special committees for a second judgment.

Special committees (under the guidance of members of the teachers' committee).—Chosen by class or by the teacher in charge. These groups passed upon the various units of work, for example, welfare, excursions, poetry, etc.

Articles accepted by these committees were sent to the chairman who turned them over to the editorial board for final consideration for the yearbook. These committees were supposed to see that their particular units were properly represented and to solicit further contributions if the material was lacking or unsatisfactory. It was also their duty to arrange the material and prepare a suitable introduction for their section of the work.

Central committee or editorial board (under the guidance of chairman and other members of the teachers' committee).—Members elected or appointed from each division of the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades; two pupils from each class, making a committee of twelve in all.

All material accepted by the other committees was passed upon by this board, making the third time that each article had been considered by pupil committees. Accepted contributions were then filed and submitted for the yearbook.

This committee also worked out a general plan for the contents and arrangement of material.

Art committee (working with art teacher).—One member elected or appointed from each class from the fifth grade to the seventh.

It was the duty of this committee to decide on the size, shape, and general make-up of the yearbook and to select or make a cover design and all necessary illustrations.

So numerous were the contributions from the various groups that the editorial board found it necessary to meet several times a week. Aside from passing final judgment on every article in the book, this board mapped out a plan of arrangement for all of the material and decided on titles for the headings and subheadings. Finally, they counted the words and helped to estimate the number of pages needed. Several members typed the manuscript to make it more presentable for the printer.

At the last meeting the editors offered suggestions for the simplification of the work for another time. The following is a tabulation taken from the secretary's record of May 25:

1. Each contribution must be handed in on uniform paper.
2. Articles are to be typed, if possible; if not, they are to be neatly and legibly written.
3. The name of the grade, but not the name of the author, is to appear on each paper. This is to help keep judgments impersonal and make an article stand entirely on its own worth.
4. The number of words in any contribution is to be written in the upper right-hand corner. For poetry it should be the number of lines.
5. All spelling, punctuation, and, as far as possible, all mistakes in sentence structure must be corrected before the article leaves the room committee.
6. Comments made by room and special committees must not be written on the margins of the contributions but must be written on separate slips and attached with clips.
7. Only the very best articles a class can produce are to be submitted to the editorial board.
8. If these conditions are not fulfilled, the editorial board reserves the right to reject any or all articles without further consideration.

The values gained by the children were many. A quotation from the report of one of the teachers who worked on the yearbook committee follows:

Probably only those who served on the yearbook committee have been in a position to see the very great value of this piece of work. The big committee meetings were not only unusual but remarkable. They were conducted by children. The order was perfect; the children were prompt and responsive, gave excellent suggestions, and were faultless in manners and conduct. The simple dignity of those meetings was beautiful and inspirational. One would never have dreamed that those children could be noisy or rude at any time or in any place. To my mind, those meetings rank among the best of any of our undertakings in the school. I regret that all of the pupils could not have had the experience which the few were privileged to have. In the future, if we are to undertake a like problem, I hope an entirely different group of pupils may make up the committees for the work.

Other values gained may be summarized:

First, it provides a common objective for each class in the department, from the first grade to the seventh. No other single undertaking is so all-inclusive as this. Through representatives and committees it brings classes into frequent intercourse with each other and establishes a relationship akin to that brought about by festivals, choruses, and assemblies.

Second, it provides many opportunities for co-operative work and the exercise of initiative, leadership, and judgment. A distinctive feature is its interclass group work which gives vertical contact as well as the ordinary horizontal.

Third, the yearbook offers the best possible stimulus for creative work of almost any kind and provides a permanent record of accomplishments.

Fourth, and most interesting, it can be made a means of raising the standard of our English work throughout the department, if each class makes the most of the incentive it provides.

The growth and development gained by the pupils have been very perceptible and satisfying.

The yearbook contains accounts of typical activities of the work in the elementary school. Such phases of school life as self-government, festivals, welfare work, assemblies, and excursions are described by the children in interesting articles. A representative constitution, a code of manners, the lines of a Christmas play, the words and music of a song, and several unusual stories and poems are found in the book. Some of the photographs, drawings, and designs were also made by the children.

Percival Chubb says of it:

It is a delightful transcript of childhood, apart altogether from its convincing value as an educational exhibit. Verse and prose have those marks of spontaneity and heartiness which are the triumphs of skilled and wise handling. This exhibit shows what can be done when the artistic and creative conscience is aroused and nourished.